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ABSTRACT

This issue paper, one in a series that United States Agency for International Development (USAID) produces, provides analytical input to policy makers and practitioners on ways to address the pressing educational challenges in the Muslim world. The paper summarizes the findings and guidance contained in a full report of a three month desk study that analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of secular and Islamic educational systems in 12 Muslim countries (Egypt, Morocco, Yemen, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Uzbekistan). It focuses particularly on access to and quality of secular and Islamic education. Key findings of the report are: (1) most countries studied have made significant strides in primary school enrollment in secular/public education systems, although secondary enrollment rates remain low; and (2) one of the strengths of Islamic schools in most of the countries studied is that they are highly accessible, and most do not appear to have links with extremist Islamic groups. The report concludes that the best educational strategies in Muslim countries encourage public and moderate Islamic school systems to complement each other to reach all learners with enriched content. It recommends ways to improve access to and quality within schools, noting that none of the countries studied, with the exception of Malaysia, has established an effective education system capable of providing universal access to quality education. Includes 14 notes. Annexes contain: "Summary of Country Education Profiles" and "Summary of Country Profiles of Islamic Schools." (BT)

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Strengthening Education in the Muslim World

Summary of the Desk Study

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This Issue Paper, one in a series that USAID produces regularly, provides analytical input to policymakers and practitioners on ways to tackle the pressing educational challenges in the Muslim world. It does not necessarily represent the views of the Agency. This paper was written by Sharon Benoliel, and was based on a preliminary draft report that was prepared by Matt Seymour, Uzma Anzar, Nina Etyemezian, and Victor Farren.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

To advance USAID's understanding of how to better support the educational needs of the Muslim world, the Center for Development Information and Evaluation[1] (CDIE) in USAID's Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination (PPC) undertook a three-month desk study to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of secular and Islamic educational systems in 12 Muslim countries.

This issue paper summarizes the findings and guidance contained in the full 200-plus page report, focusing particularly on access to and the quality of secular and Islamic education. The full report

- discusses in detail the methodology used for the study
- analyzes economic, social, and educational statistics for 39 Muslim countries
- describes the secular and Islamic school systems in 12 Muslim countries in terms of access and quality of education, management of the educational system, preparation of students for secular employment, donor support to the education sector, types of Islamic schools, any radical affiliation with religious schools, and parental preference for schooling
- provides guidance for strengthening the public and Islamic school systems, including specific guidance for each country studied

[1] CDIE is now the Office of Development Evaluation and Information (PPC/DEI).

Key Findings

Secular or public schools. Most countries studied for this report have made significant strides in primary school enrollment in secular or public education systems. However, enrollment rates in secondary schools remain low. The two most significant factors contributing to low access at both primary and secondary levels appear to be poverty and a shortage of nearby schools.

Over the last decade, the quality of education in both primary and secondary secular schools has declined in all of the countries studied. Deterioration of educational quality is especially pronounced at the secondary level. The most significant factors contributing to low quality at all levels were inadequate government investment, a shortage of qualified teachers, limited and ineffective teacher training, outdated curricula, inadequate supply and poor quality of learning materials and textbooks, and weak institutional capacity at the central and local levels.

Islamic schools. By comparison, one of the strengths of Islamic schools in most of the countries studied is that they are highly accessible. Most are community-based, and they are often available where there are no nearby secular public schools. Also, they are generally more affordable than public schools.

Some Islamic schools teach religious content exclusively while others combine religious studies with the entire government curricula or a few secular subjects. However, the quality of education in public schools, however poor, is comparatively better than that of most Islamic schools, even those that follow the public school curriculum. Most teachers in Islamic

schools have only religious training and are therefore usually less qualified academically to teach secular subjects than teachers in public schools.

Most Islamic schools in the countries studied do not appear to have links to extremist Islamic groups, but the minority that do pose a problem. In about half of the countries studied, many Islamic schools function under the supervision of their respective governments, and those that combine Islamic education with the national secular curriculum particularly are often supported financially by the government. However, private Islamic schools exist in all of the countries studied and receive financing from the community and from private financiers, many from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf states.

While the majority of parents in all of the countries studied enroll their children in public schools, there is a growing trend to send children to the expanding number of Islamic schools. In some cases, this reflects a lack of access to secular schools. In other cases, it reflects the educational preferences of parents. Some parents supplement secular education with religious classes in Islamic schools at the beginning or end of the day or on the weekend.

Summary of Recommendations

The study concluded that the best educational strategies in Muslim countries encourage both public and moderate Islamic school systems to complement each other to reach all learners with enriched content. In some countries, public schools are the preferred educational choice of most parents, as long as they are affordable and nearby. In these countries, especially where there is concern about extremism being fostered in some Islamic schools, concentrating on making public schools more affordable for poor parents and increasing the number of schools in rural areas is a reasonable strategy. However, increasing the number of public schools, particularly at the secondary level, in isolated areas may not be possible in the near term, even with increased educational spending.

Alternative strategies could include supporting establishment of secular community schools or strengthening of Islamic schools, particularly those under government oversight. Islamic schools may provide a viable alternative to public schools, and they should be viewed as a potential resource for those without access to public schools or who prefer Islamic schools.

Strengthening Secular Schools

With respect to secular or public education systems, the deficiencies in access and quality vary in degree and intensity among the countries studied, as do the nature of the impediments currently limiting progress. Thus, the mix of interventions needed to strengthen public education systems will vary from country to country.

Access. Interventions that can effectively address constraints that impede access to schools include

- providing scholarships, free textbooks, and school supplies
- increasing the supply of primary and secondary schools and educational opportunities for out-of-school youth
- shaping the supply of schools to meet the needs of girls and their parents

Quality. Ways to improve the quality of education include

- establishing a system of incentives to attract and retain more qualified teachers and encourage greater teacher commitment
- providing increased opportunities for quality inservice training
- reforming outdated and inappropriate curricula and increasing the supply of quality textbooks and instructional materials
- increasing the number of school readiness programs

- promoting greater community participation in schools
- strengthening institutional capacity to more effectively manage and deliver education programs

The Agency should support improvements in both secular and religious institutions—but only those that foster a respect for universal human values of dignity, compassion, and tolerance.

Strengthening Islamic Schools

As with public schools, the prioritized mix of interventions needed to strengthen Islamic schools must be based on each country's particular circumstances and could include

- engaging Islamic school leaders to participate in providing education to all learners
- establishing government oversight for all Islamic schools
- increasing the number of Islamic schools that offer the nationally-approved curriculum
- strengthening the quality of the secular education provided in Islamic schools
- encouraging moderate religious teachings in Islamic schools

Summary Conclusions

None of the countries studied, with the exception of Malaysia, has established an effective education system capable of providing universal access to quality education. Nor have these countries provided a teaching-learning environment that imbues students with a sense of belonging, of having an opportunity to participate meaningfully, and of being recognized for that contribution. This gratification is essential to successful pursuit of the long-term goal of completing the educational process. Dynamic, child-centered, interactive classrooms focused on practical and relevant subjects usually engage young people. As during the Prophet's lifetime, Islamic education must draw its substance from everyday concerns and the larger issues facing the world. Accordingly, effective education systems should provide all children with a level of understanding, commitment, and social responsibility that will both motivate and enable them to serve Islam, their communities, and the world effectively.

In order to support the educational needs and aspirations of the Muslim world, USAID's programs must build on the strengths and ideals of the indigenous culture. The study concludes that the Agency should support improvements in both secular and religious institutions—but only those that foster a respect for universal human values of dignity, compassion, and tolerance. Governments should be encouraged to certify the quality of their schools. And while the extent of religious radicalism in Islamic school systems is difficult to quantify, it does exist—and we must recognize that access to quality education alone cannot dissuade all vulnerable youth from joining terrorist groups.

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Education in the Muslim World

Introduction

During Europe's "dark ages," Muslim societies were enjoying glorious days of pluralism, artistic expression, and scientific and educational advancement. Later, however, after the defeat of one Muslim empire after another, many Muslim leaders and clergy members encouraged the closure of doors on ijtihad—independent reasoning—and called for going back to the basics, which for many meant the times of the Prophet. In recent times, economic and social progress in the Muslim world has generally slowed, including, in particular, in the education sector. Most countries of the Muslim world have yet to establish effective educational systems that provide all children with access to quality education and prepare them to contribute to economic progress at home and participate in the global marketplace.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, USAID has redoubled efforts to understand how the educational needs and aspirations of the Muslim world can be supported in a way that builds on the strengths and ideals of their religious, social, and cultural traditions.[2] Many researchers, educators, and practitioners believe that improving the educational systems in these countries is one way to bring about development advances that will help more Muslim children grow up to be productive members of their societies and may help diminish their vulnerability to recruitment efforts by extremist Islamic groups.

USAID and other donors possess a rich knowledge base about effective educational interventions. Achieving positive educational outcomes, however, depends on choosing the right mix of interventions—those that respond to the particular educational needs in a given country. In countries with large Muslim populations,[3] donors have learned the importance of considering religious and cultural traditions when making such choices in partnership with the host country.

Purpose of the Study

USAID's Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination (PPC) senior management commissioned the Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE)[4] to conduct a desk study to advance USAID's understanding of how to better support the educational needs of the Muslim world. The study analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of secular and Islamic educational systems[5] in 12 Muslim countries.[6] Based on this analysis, guidance was developed for strengthening the public and Islamic school systems to better meet the needs

[2] The term "Muslim world" is used for convenience to refer to countries with large Muslim populations. It is not meant to downplay the diversity of values, perspectives, traditions, and development needs that exist across these countries.

[3] Henceforth referred to as "Muslim countries."

[4] CDIE is now the Office of Development Evaluation and Information (PPC/DEI).

[5] The focus of the study was nonreligious schools and Islamic religious schools. The term "secular" is used to refer to both public and private nonreligious schools. When the discussion pertains to only public nonreligious schools, the term "public schools" is often used. "Islamic" schools include public schools and schools whose primary focus is to teach religious content, even though in some countries many also teach secular subjects. Due to time and resource constraints, there was no attempt to research all nonreligious private schools or non-Muslim religious schools.

[6] Due to time and resource constraints, the number of countries studied had to be limited. Initially 18 countries were selected, but several were eliminated due to a lack of information on their Islamic schools. The countries selected are located in the following five regions of the world: Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia), Middle East and North Africa (Egypt, Morocco, Yemen), Central Asia (Uzbekistan), South Asia (Bangladesh, Pakistan), and West Africa (Nigeria, Guinea, Mali, Senegal).

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of Muslim parents and their children. The guidance suggests ways to increase access to quality schools, providing parents with a credible and competitive educational alternative to Islamic schools that do not provide a secular education or that teach militant Islamic ideology. The findings and guidance presented in this report are aimed at stimulating discussion and debate by policymakers and practitioners on how best to tackle the pressing educational challenges in the Muslim world. They do not, however, represent the policies of USAID.

Methodology

The methodology of this three-month desk study was based on the review of secondary research and interviews with a small sample of individual experts. This methodology obviously posed considerable limitations on what information could be collected and, therefore, what conclusions could be drawn. Without fieldwork, it was impossible to take full advantage of the array of documents and other experts that could shed light on the topic. Despite the extensive experience of many of the experts interviewed, the information provided was inherently limited by their personal agendas and worldviews.

The findings and guidance presented in this report are aimed at stimulating discussion and debate by policymakers and practitioners on how best to tackle the pressing educational challenges in the Muslim world.

While this study by no means captures the full breadth of the issues and characteristics of the education systems in the countries studied, it does, nevertheless, make an important contribution to the critically important topic of Islamic schools. Relatively little work has been done to document the strengths and weaknesses of Islamic schools and to assess their potential role in providing education to children in Muslim countries. The information that emerged during this study has already proved extremely useful to the policy and strategic planning staff in USAID and other U.S. Government agencies.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Education Systems in Islamic Countries

Secular or Public Education Systems

The study's key findings assessed access to education at the primary and secondary level and the quality of education.

Enrollment Increases but Access Remains a Problem

Since the 1990 Education for All conference in Jomtien, Thailand made universal primary education a formal international development goal, most countries studied have made noteworthy strides in enrolling students in primary school. Uzbekistan, Egypt, Morocco, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia have achieved, or are close to achieving, universal primary education. Yet, Pakistan, Yemen, Nigeria, Guinea, Mali, and Senegal, while increasing primary enrollment rates over the last 12 years, have primary gross enrollment rates that fall below 90 percent, with some as low as 59 percent (Guinea) and 53 percent (Mali). However, all of the countries studied, even those that have achieved near universal primary education, have large numbers of school-age children who have never enrolled in primary school.

Access to secondary school is key to building a skilled, knowledge-based workforce. Secondary school provides students with broader and more advanced skills and knowledge and reinforces the learning that takes place at the primary level. Literacy surveys indicate that adults with fewer than six years of education often return to functional illiteracy soon after leaving school. While primary enrollment rates are rising in most of the countries studied, secondary gross enrollment rates in eight of the 12 countries are below 50 percent. In the West African countries, secondary school gross enrollment rates fall below 30 percent. The limited progress made in increasing secondary school enrollment rates will pose serious challenges for large numbers of youth as they try to find paid employment.

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In the countries studied, depressed labor markets have left many young men and women unemployed. Those with minimal educational credentials and qualifications are at a particular disadvantage, and many have little hope of getting a job in the future. Without a means to earn a living—and with growing frustration, boredom, and a loss of faith in their governments' commitment to provide them with opportunities that prepare them for employment—this demographic group is fertile ground for recruitment by extremist Islamic groups. For some unemployed young men, joining the neighborhood branch of a national terrorist organization is an opportunity to achieve a renewed sense of importance. Efforts to increase access to secondary education and the availability of employment opportunities could go far in diminishing the appeal of extremist movements.

The two most significant factors contributing to low access in both primary and secondary education appear to be household poverty and a shortage of nearby schools. For poor parents, poor quality of education and depressed labor markets discourage them from enrolling or keeping their children in school, especially at the secondary level.

- *Household poverty is perhaps the most significant factor contributing to low enrollment in all of the countries studied except for Malaysia.* Although public schooling is "free" in all of the countries, out-of-pocket school costs (such as fees for textbooks and uniforms) as well as the opportunity costs (loss of a child's labor at home) make schooling unaffordable for many poor rural parents. In some countries, such as Uzbekistan, there is an increased incidence of poor rural children dropping out of primary school to help support their families. Poverty has a particularly negative effect on girls' enrollment. Studies have found that when financial resources are limited, parents are more willing to invest in boys' than in girls' education. Many parents believe education to be more critical for boys, whom they see as the major support for families, and many parents believe that education plays an important role in improving their boys' job prospects.

- *A shortage of primary- and especially secondary-schools, particularly in rural or isolated areas, is a significant factor associated with low enrollment rates in eight of the 12 countries studied.* For example, in 2000 and 2001, over 10,000 children in Senegal who succeeded in completing primary school and passing the exam were unable to continue their studies because the system lacked the physical capacity to enroll them. The middle school system has the physical capacity to enroll 25 percent of the age cohort. The dearth of "appropriate"[7] schools in close proximity to where girls live is a significant cause of low enrollment rates for girls in several of the countries.

Lack of Investment and Training Diminish Quality

The quality of education in most of the countries studied was quite poor. When children demonstrate poor learning achievement, poor parents are less inclined to send their children to school and to keep them there—they cannot afford the loss of their children's labor unless they believe that their education will contribute to greater job prospects with higher income potential.

With economic downturns in several countries, especially since the 1990s, the number of jobs in the labor market have decreased. When parents begin to lose confidence in their children's ability to find paid employment after they finish school, more immediate financial concerns lead many poor parents to pull their children out of school—especially secondary school—so they can contribute to the family income and help with household chores.

Educational quality has declined in all countries, including in Uzbekistan and to some extent Malaysia, both of which once had quality public schooling. Over the past 12 years, most countries emphasized increasing enrollments. Educational systems have struggled to manage the surges in primary enrollment rates that have resulted from demographic trends and the movement toward

[7] What is considered appropriate varies by country. In Pakistan, for example, appropriate often means girls' schools with female teachers.

universal primary education. They have been faced with managing the complexities of recruiting, training, and supervising large numbers of new teachers. But they have also been faced with educating the many "academically unprepared" children who have been drawn from the least advantaged groups in society as a result of efforts to provide education for all children. Students in most of these countries are consistently experiencing low quality of learning in classrooms, resulting in low academic achievement, as indicated by the following examples:

- In a 1998 standardized achievement test given in Yemen to fifth graders in mathematics, science, and Arabic, the percentage of students who passed the test at a satisfactory level were 3, 14, and 5 respectively.

- A 1998 survey in Bangladesh found that only 29 percent of all primary students had gained basic competencies in reading, writing, and mathematics.

- Indonesian students scored relatively low in international comparisons of reading, science, and mathematics.

Deterioration of educational quality is especially pronounced at the secondary level in most countries. As donors and governments focused more on primary education during the past decade, secondary education was neglected. It suffered in terms of poor allocation of funds, and few meaningful improvements were made in the curriculum or in teacher training. As a result, many secondary school graduates fail to gain the core skills they will need to function effectively in all aspects of their life—including such skills as literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking habits.

Factors contributing to poor quality education included

- *Inadequate allocation of national budgets to the education sector.* In most of the countries studied, government investment in the education sector has been inadequate for funding teacher salaries, building new schools, renovating deteriorating school facilities, providing teacher training, and other components critical to quality. Corruption has further reduced the amount of educational funding available.

- *Shortage of qualified teachers.* In many countries, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Yemen, rural schools often end up with a disproportionate share of underqualified teachers because there is a scarcity of qualified teachers living in rural areas. Furthermore, most qualified teachers prefer teaching in urban areas where living conditions are better. During the early- to mid-1990s in Pakistan, qualification requirements were relaxed so that new rural schools could be quickly staffed. Local Pakistani women with eight years of education were recruited and offered three-month crash teacher training courses, which provided them with little preparation for teaching.

Many secondary school graduates fail to gain the core skills they will need to function effectively in all aspects of their life—including such skills as literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking habits.

- *Limited and ineffective teacher training.* In most of the countries studied, few teachers are provided opportunities to upgrade skills through inservice training. And where teacher training is provided, it is often of poor quality. Most teacher training focuses on learning the content of the curriculum rather than on the development of modern pedagogical skills to help students learn. Teachers are not educated about developmental stages and appropriate learning environments for young children. As a result, an authoritarian teaching style that promotes passive learning characterizes most classroom teaching. Young children are usually expected to sit still all day and learn almost entirely by rote. Most teachers follow an encyclopedic and information-based curriculum that fails to nurture the development of critical

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thinking, analytical, and problem-solving skills. In Pakistan, Bangladesh, Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Morocco, Yemen, and Egypt, teachers have little training in preparing lesson plans based on the learning capacity of their students. Not only are most teachers not trained in effective pedagogical methods, but many are inadequately trained in the subject matter as well. Teacher training in Pakistan has been so poor that many teachers cannot read or teach from primary-level books. USAID-funded research conducted in the early 1990s at Pakistan's teacher training colleges showed that the teachers' mastery of the content barely exceeded that of students.

- *Lack of incentives to encourage greater teacher commitment.* Despite the enormous challenges and responsibilities that teachers face, their salaries are often inadequate to cover basic living expenses, they have low professional status, and they receive little professional support. The failure to build an adequate system of incentives, coupled with minimal if any supervision, has led to high rates of teacher absenteeism.

- *Overcrowded classrooms.* With near-universal primary enrollment in the urban areas of many of the countries studied, many schools suffer from overcrowding. In rural areas, most primary schools are one-room facilities where one or two teachers teach all primary-age children in a village. Due to teacher shortages in Bangladesh, schools have implemented double shifts to meet the demand for education. The shorter school day restricts classroom student contact with the teacher. The teacher-student contact time in Bangladesh is already the lowest in the world with only 2.5 hours per day spent in primary schools. Even with double shifts, classrooms are overcrowded, with an average teacher-student ratio of 1:63.

- *Outdated and ineffective curricula.* The secondary education curricula in many of the countries studied do not incorporate relevant or state-of-the art subject matter that is based on the country's social and economic needs or promote skill development that will prepare students to participate in current or future job markets. Also, curricula at both the primary and secondary levels in many countries fail to pace and sequence teaching to what children learn at different ages.

- *Inadequate supply and poor quality learning materials and textbooks.* Because of the limited resources devoted to the education sector in most of the countries studied, most schools have an inadequate supply of quality learning materials and textbooks.

- *Weak institutional capacity to effectively manage and deliver education programs.* Education officials at the national level are usually disconnected from local educational needs and often create impediments to achieving higher quality education. For instance, in Egypt, teachers must organize their lessons according to national directives on lesson planning rather than on the learning needs of their students. Where efforts have been made to transfer responsibilities to local levels, capacity at these levels was often too weak to effectively carry out the new responsibilities. Poor planning, management, and delivery of education programs leave most educational deficiencies unresolved. Also, the absence of clear, open, and transparent procedures governing the management of financial resources devoted to education has permitted rampant corruption in the education sector of many countries.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Islamic School Systems

Islamic schools take many forms throughout the Muslim world. Some emphasize religious subjects exclusively, such as the study of the Koran, Islamic law, the Prophet's traditions and sayings, and Islamic logic. Many teach a moderate form of Islam. An increasing number, however, are embracing and basing their teaching on "fundamentalist" or militant Islamic ideology. While many Islamic schools teach only religious subjects, others combine religious studies with the entire government curricula or a few secular subjects. Some of these Islamic schools

function under government supervision. Key issues analyzed include access, quality, affiliation with extremist Islamic groups, and parental preferences for schooling.

Islamic Schools Are Highly Accessible

One of the strengths of Islamic schools in most of the countries studied is that they are highly accessible. Most schools are community-based and available in both urban and rural areas, including areas where no nearby public school exists. Also, they are generally more affordable than public schools. Some Islamic schools offer free or low-cost education, and some even offer free boarding, which is particularly attractive to poor parents and students who cannot afford to attend public schools.

Educational Quality Often Below Public School Level

Islamic schools in Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Guinea, Mali, Senegal, and Yemen generally teach only religious subjects. Most of these schools serve the educational needs of children who plan a career in the religious sector or whose parents want their children to learn more about Islam. In countries where Arabic is the local language, evidence indicates that Islamic schools that focus only on religious subjects can help to develop language and learning skills that can be useful to children in their early achievements in public schools. For instance, through Koranic preschools in Morocco that teach the basic concepts of the Koran, children also learn the basic Arabic alphabet and begin the process of becoming literate in Arabic. Studies conducted in Morocco on the pedagogical impact of Koranic schools found that children who attended Koranic preschools outperformed those who had not in Arabic reading achievement. This difference in achievement, however, diminished by the time children reached grades 4 and 5. Nevertheless, because these schools do not teach secular subjects, they do not provide children with a solid education that will prepare them for participation in their country's labor market.

Several other countries, however, do have Islamic schools that provide secular education comparable in content to the public school system. In Egypt, Morocco, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nigeria, some Islamic schools follow the national curriculum approved for public schools. Egypt's Al-Azhar education system provides students with a secular education that is comparable to the education provided in public schools, and their preparation for employment is similar to that of students who go through the public school system. Given Egypt's problems absorbing educated citizens into its limited labor market, graduates of the Al-Azhar school system at least have a greater chance of employment in the religious sector as Islamic teachers, scholars, or spiritual leaders than do graduates of the public school system. Morocco's Islamic "Original Education" schools and Bangladesh's Aliya madrasas also teach all of the secular subjects taught in public schools. And similar to Al-Azhar schools in Egypt, graduates of these Islamic schools have skills comparable to public school graduates that qualify them for employment in the labor market as well as in the religious sector. However, just as many countries are having trouble absorbing educated citizens into limited labor markets, the numbers of religiously trained students have outstripped the demand for employment in the religious sectors in many countries.

Most schools are community-based and available in both urban and rural areas, including areas where no nearby public school exists. Also, they are generally more affordable than public schools.

The quality of education in public schools, however poor, is comparatively better than in most Islamic schools that follow the public school curriculum. Most teachers in Islamic schools are products of religious training exclusively, and are therefore usually less qualified academically to teach secular subjects than teachers in public schools. Similar to that found in many public schools, rote learning and memorization are often the main pedagogical tools used in Islamic schools. However, limited and selective evidence (in West Africa and Morocco) shows

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that some Islamic schools employ a few "modern" pedagogical methods such as peer tutoring, group learning, and self-pacing.

Links to Extremist Islamic Groups—Rare but Worrisome

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, host government officials in many Muslim countries have been concerned that some Islamic schools may be breeding grounds for terrorist groups. Many scholars specializing in the politics of Islamic extremism maintain that funding from the Gulf, particularly from Saudi Arabia, has been used to propagate the teachings of Wahhabism in Islamic schools throughout the world. Wahhabism, a school of Islamic thought that originated in the eighteenth century on the Arabian peninsula, has been characterized as an extreme orthodoxy. It has been used by many Islamic radicals to advocate and legitimize the use of violence for political ends.

Available evidence suggests that most Islamic schools in the countries studied have no links to extremist groups—the problem is limited to a minority that do.

Despite the difficulty in providing objective evidence, international NGOs and mainstream media have issued many reports and articles suggesting a dangerous affiliation between some Islamic schools and extremist Islamic groups who teach extremist doctrines. These reports often originate from community members and government officials who are unable to corroborate them with documentation. While obtaining reliable information on this subject is extremely difficult, available evidence suggests that most Islamic schools in the countries studied have no links to extremist groups—the problem is limited to a minority that do. Most Islamic schools serve only as centers of learning for future Islamic scholars and clerics and for Muslim children who wish to learn more about Islam.

Compelling evidence has emerged, however, indicating that extremist groups have found a base in some schools in Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Yemen. Some students indoctrinated in extremist Islamic ideology have been used as foot soldiers to fight in local and foreign wars. Examples include

- *Pakistan.* Some madrasas in Pakistan, for example, created a large cadre of jihadis who fought in Afghanistan and other Muslim countries. Many reports confirm that the Taliban were educated in madrasas that were located along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

- *Indonesia.* According to several articles, Abubakar Baasyir is the spiritual leader of Jemaah Islamiah, a Southeast Asian militant Islamic network that has as its hub Pondok Ngruki Pesantren, a religious boarding school in Indonesia that was cofounded by Baasyir. According to an Al Qaeda operative who was arrested in the summer of 2001, Baasyir was Al Qaeda's senior representative for Southeast Asia and was instructed to plan attacks on U.S. interests in the region using operatives and resources from Jemaah Islamiah. While Baasyir denies any connection to these plots, he admits he has inspired students to fight for Muslim causes in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, and the Philippines. "The students who absorb my teaching and finally understand Islam completely want to implement the teaching of jihad," he stated.* One of those students attended Baasyir's pesantren in Indonesia and is now in an Indonesian jail.

- *Malaysia.* There are several reported cases of madrasas in Malaysia being closed due to allegations of extremist elements within these schools. Government action has been swift under Malaysia's Internal Security Act. According to an article in the *Herald Tribune* (February 12, 2002), a raid on a madrasa serving about 200 children in Malaysia's state of Johor, on January 3, 2002, led to the school's closure. The school was linked to a group

*A. Sipress and E. Nakashima, "An Inspiration for Muslim Fighters" (Pondok Ngruki). *Washington Post*, September 23, 2002.

of Muslim extremists. In Johor, the state government is reviewing the religious education systems to ensure that religion is not used for political purposes and that students can find paid employment after they finish school.

- *Yemen.* According to some reports, some Yemenis who had converted to Wahhabism while studying in Saudi Arabia or fighting with the mujahadin in Afghanistan, introduced a Salafi[9] movement in Yemen during the 1980s. Since these salafis established many madrasas during the past 20 years, it is likely that the Islamic teachings in these madrasas are Wahhabi-based. The government has become wary of the activities in some madrasas and is working to modify the curriculum to prevent the fueling of extremist ideologies. According to a *New York Times* article (January 9, 2003), the government has closed down some 1,300 religious schools.

Despite the existence of extremist Islamic groups in all of the countries studied, no reliable evidence has emerged that currently links such groups with Islamic schools in Uzbekistan, Egypt, Morocco, Bangladesh, or those in West Africa. This does not mean, however, that extremist groups have neither established Islamic schools nor influenced the teachings in some schools in these countries. During the economic downturn that began in the 1980s with the decline of the oil boom in Nigeria, riots were staged by Islamic fundamentalists who were products of the Koranic school system in northern Nigeria. These fundamentalists felt alienated from more westernized, educated, and salaried modernist Muslims, whose greater wealth enabled them to cope with hardships during the downturn. These extremist elements appeared to diminish in importance as economic stability returned.[10]

In Uzbekistan, some reports suggest that money from Wahhabi sects in the Gulf states is available for some radicals in Uzbekistan to operate underground religious schools. With the government's history of cracking down on potentially threatening Islamic extremists, the ability to establish Islamic schools with extremist political motives will likely be limited. Radical links with Bangladesh's Aliya madrasas, where most Islamic students are enrolled, are unlikely to emerge because they teach the national secular curriculum and are financially supported and monitored by the government. There are, however, some recent reports linking some extremist Islamic groups with some madrasas[11]—most likely Bangladesh's Quomi madrasas—because they function outside of government oversight and depend on private funding sources, some portion of which reportedly comes from Gulf states that promote Wahhabism. Recipients of such funding are often subject to conditions that require using the donor's curriculum and textbooks.

Governments will clamp down hard on extremist elements in Islamic schools they view as a threat to their existence. Extremism is more likely to flourish where governments are too weak politically to risk alienating radical Islamic leaders, and are therefore less inclined to take strong actions against extremist groups. In some countries, however, efforts aimed at diminishing the power of these movements fueled the problem. For example, as the Uzbek government clamped down on religious movements, external forces, aided by money from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, countered the government's actions by funding more religious schools and clandestine groups.

While some Islamic schools provide a fertile ground for recruitment efforts by extremist Islamic groups, many recruits never attended Islamic schools. Many are disciples of extremist Islamic clerics, and many of the most notorious terrorists were products of the modern secular education system, some having even studied in Western Europe or North America. As Jabber notes in his report for the National

[9] Salafism is a current of Islamic thought which emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century. In Islamic thought, it comes closest to the western concept of "fundamentalism." Salafism did not develop as a monolithic movement but rather as a broad philosophy. One particular brand of Salafi ideology is Wahhabism.

[10] Winters, Clyde Ahmad, 1987, "Koranic Education and Militant Islam in Nigeria," *International Review of Education* 33 (2).

[11] Lintner, Bertil, "Bangladesh: A Cocoon of Terror," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 4, 2002.

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Intelligence Council, "The universe of potential recruits is a subset of the broad population, younger and more alienated, but not essentially different. Whether by class, educational level, degree of exposure to modernizing influences, or nationality, the membership of Al Qaeda, for example, is representative of the broad Muslim social spectrum."[12]

Many parents believe that Islamic schooling will help reaffirm, strengthen, and preserve their children's Muslim identity, which is perceived by many to be under threat.

Parents Increasingly Favor Islamic Schools

While the majority of parents in all of the countries studied enroll their children in secular schools, there is a growing trend showing that parents are increasingly sending their children to the expanding number of Islamic schools. In some cases, this reflects a lack of access to secular schools. In other cases, it reflects the educational preferences of parents. Also, some parents supplement secular education with religious classes in Islamic schools at the beginning or end of the day or on the weekend.

Lack of access to secular schools is a problem in many rural areas, particularly in Pakistan, Yemen, Morocco, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Guinea, Mali, and Senegal, where parents do not have the option of sending their children to secular schools. In such cases, the primary parental motive for enrolling children in Islamic schools is to take advantage of the only educational opportunity for their children because there are no local secular schools or they are unaffordable.

The rising popularity of Islamic schools reflects a preference for Islamic schools over secular schools in some quarters. Some parents in urban areas send their children to Islamic schools, even when secular schools are nearby and parents can afford to send their children to them. This is also true in rural areas in view of the significant role that religion plays in many poor traditional households.

The primary motive of parents who prefer their children to be educated in Islamic schools appears to be their desire for their children to be more securely grounded in Islam and to grow up to be good Muslims. Many parents believe that Islamic schooling will help reaffirm, strengthen, and preserve their children's Muslim identity, which is perceived by many to be under threat by the invading "immoral," non-Muslim influences of the modern world. The increasing rise of enrollment in Islamic schools in Egypt appears to reflect this "going back to religion" phenomenon. Some suggest that its momentum began after the 1967 war with Israel: believing that Israel triumphed because of its religious convictions, they suggested that by going back to Islam Egypt could regain its strength and take charge once again. Some parents believe that strict secular education makes one a slave to the West and that they may be able to lift themselves out of poverty and submission to their government by returning to their Islamic roots. For them, asserting their Islamic identity becomes a way to assert their difference from Western values.

While most Muslim parents who send their children to Islamic schools place a high value on the benefits of a religious education, they also want to ensure that their children receive the kind of education that will prepare them for employment in the country's labor market. Most jobs in the public or private sector require literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge of secular subjects. In Egypt, Morocco, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nigeria, where some Islamic schools incorporate the full national curriculum approved for public schools, some parents believe that such Islamic schools offer their children the best of both worlds.

Some Islamic schools also provide technical training in computers, entrepreneurial business management, farming, and cottage industries. Given the poor quality of public schools, some parents see the

[12] Jabber, Paul, "Political and Economic Reform in the Muslim World," Globicom, Inc., May 2002, 23.

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practical job training provided in some Islamic schools as an attractive alternative. In Indonesia, some pesantrens offer accessible, practical, and affordable job training as well as religious training.

The rising popularity of religious schools is not confined to Muslim countries. Many parents around the world prefer sending their children to religious schools, and their motives are similar to those discussed above, i.e., that in religious schools, their children will strengthen their religious identity, develop the kinds of values that are being threatened by the modern world, and will receive a better quality education.

Islamic schools may also serve as a supplement to secular schools. In Uzbekistan, Yemen, Indonesia, Nigeria, Guinea, Mali and Senegal, many parents follow a tandem approach whereby their children attend secular classes at public schools and religious classes in Islamic schools. In these countries, parents send their children to secular schools because they want their children to have the secular education needed for employment. To ensure that their children also have a secure grounding in Islamic teachings, they send their children to Islamic schools at the beginning or end of the day or on weekends.

In Uzbekistan, parents increasingly send their children to Islamic schools. However, as these schools do not teach secular subjects, parents do not consider them an alternative, but a supplement to secular schools. The situation is similar in Yemen. But sectarian tensions in Yemen between Sunnis and Shi'is, Salafis and Zaydis, and other groups have led to a growth in the number of madrasas reflecting these groups' different religious orientations. Parents who want to ensure that their children learn their sect's values, precepts, and traditions send their children to madrasas that correspond to their sect.

In Guinea, Mali, and Senegal, parents who send their children to Islamic schools do so because they want their children to learn about Islam, and their children's attendance signifies their commitment to their religion. Parents see the Islamic school as "their school," and it symbolizes, along with attendance at their mosque, their Islamic beliefs and practices. If parents have access to public primary schools, they will send—simultaneously or in sequence—their children to Islamic school and then to the public school as initial preparation for employment in the labor market.

Recommendations for Strengthening Education in the Muslim World

Deficiencies in educational access and quality will not be resolved unless national leaders are committed to undertaking important educational reforms and increasing educational funding to levels sufficient to bring about permanent educational improvements. In countries where deficiencies are permitted to continue, many children will be educationally unprepared for jobs in the labor market; and those who attend Islamic schools that teach a militant Islamic ideology may at some point pose a threat to the country's political and economic stability.

Most traditional donor-funded educational activities, whether aimed at improving access or quality, have focused on secular schools. This has proven to be relatively effective in many developing countries. However, making secular schools the only or main focus in many Muslim countries, especially where an "Islamic revival" is underway, may not lead to the desired outcomes. Educational strategies in Muslim countries should encourage the public and moderate Islamic school systems to work together to reach all learners. In this way, the education system will be more responsive to its ultimate customer—parents who seek a decent education for their children.

In some countries, most parents would choose public schools—if they were more affordable and nearby. In such countries, especially where there is a concern about extremist teachings in some Islamic schools, it is a reasonable strategy to concentrate on making public schools more affordable and increasing their number in rural areas. However, in many cases, increasing the number of public schools, particularly at the secondary level and in isolated areas, is not possible in the near term, even with increased educational spending. Alternative strategies could include supporting the establishment of secular community schools, or strengthening Islamic schools, particularly those that are under government oversight. Strengthening Islamic schools may attract parents who send their children to Islamic schools that do not teach secular subjects or that teach an extreme form of Islam. Efforts should focus on those "moderate" schools that are open to strengthening the quality and instruction of their secular curriculum.

The following offers guidance for strengthening the public and Islamic school systems. With the exception of Malaysia, all of the countries included in this study will need external assistance to effectively address existing educational deficiencies. These needs far exceed the available resources of host governments or any one donor. Through active and intensive coordination among donors and the host country government, donors can pursue programs that complement one another and that build on one another's priorities and areas of competitive advantage. However, before donor assistance to the education sector can be fruitful, the host country must first demonstrate a clear commitment to achieving and sustaining educational improvement.

Strengthening Public Education

With the exception of Malaysia, none of the countries studied currently has a public education system capable of effectively providing universal access to quality education. The mix of interventions needed to strengthen public education systems, and the priority assigned to each, will vary from country to country. Nevertheless, many of the countries

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suffer from similar problems that impede fuller participation in schools and undermine quality. The following discussion provides guidance for designing strategies that address access and quality constraints common to many of the countries studied.

Increasing Access through Investment and Program Improvements

Access to public education can be increased by the following:

- *Making schools more affordable.* Household poverty, especially in rural areas, is one of the major constraints to fuller participation in primary and secondary education among all of the countries studied, with the exception of Malaysia. The out-of-pocket costs for books, uniforms, and transportation deter many poor parents from sending their children, and particularly their daughters, to public schools. Instead, many children are sent to Islamic schools that are either free or very inexpensive.

  For some poor families, the decision of whether schooling is affordable is often based on different considerations for boys and girls. In many cases, if poor parents believe that a nearby public school is of sufficient quality, they are likely to accept the financial burden associated with education to ensure that their sons receive the education needed to successfully enter the country's labor market. Poor parents, however, are often less willing to sacrifice their meager resources to educate their daughters, especially because of the perceived high opportunity costs of sending them to school.

  But for poor families in abject poverty, such considerations do not even come into play. In such cases, financial breaks and incentives are often critical to get parents to send their children to school. The provision of free textbooks and school supplies, as well as waivers of the requirements for uniforms, has successfully addressed cost impediments for poor families in many countries. Providing schools nearby can also minimize, to some extent, the financial burden of education for many poor. When schools are nearby, transportation and opportunity costs decrease.

  Scholarships have also proven an effective intervention for increasing enrollment and retention of many poor boys and girls. However, many educational practitioners warn that scholarship programs can be costly and difficult to sustain. Nevertheless, scholarships can provide the interim financial relief needed during particularly difficult financial periods or until parents become convinced of the value of educating their children. In such cases, scholarships may create sufficient momentum for families to continue their children's education without scholarships. Consideration should be given to engaging and encouraging international corporations, the host country private sector, and wealthy individuals to provide scholarships on the basis of merit and need. Successful efforts to engage corporate and individual philanthropy can serve as models for "good citizenship." In Guatemala, business sector funds were collected to support girls' scholarships and proved to be an effective incentive for improving girls' persistence. Bangladesh's Female Secondary School Assistance Project (FSSAP) is another excellent example: the increase in girls' enrollment at the secondary level since the inception of the program in 1995 has been significant.

Poor parents are often less willing to sacrifice their meager resources to educate their daughters, especially because of the perceived high opportunity costs of sending them to school.

- *Eliminating barriers to girls' educational participation.* With the exception of Malaysia, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Nigeria, significant gender gaps persist, particularly at the secondary level. The most common obstacle to increasing girls' access and completion of schooling in many of the countries studied is the supply of schools—their quantity, suitability, quality, and costs. The

farther the school is from a girl's home and immediate parental supervision, the greater is the fear she will be harassed, molested, raped, or abducted en route. Thus, schools must be built within safe walking distances to ensure girls' participation. Also, establishing separate girls' schools with female teachers has an immediate and direct influence on girls' access to school, because such schools can allay parents' fears about their daughters' security and reassure them that sympathetic treatment will be the norm. This predilection intensifies as girls mature and face greater risk of sexual harassment. Where demand for girls' education is weakest, support from traditional and religious leaders can play an important role in improving girls' completion rates.

- *Increasing the supply of secondary schools.* As efforts are mounted to eliminate the shortage of primary schools, it is critical that the emphasis on achieving Education for All (EFA) objectives does not result in a continued failure to address the shortages of secondary schools. Given the tremendous shortages of secondary schools in eight of the 12 countries studied, host governments, even with increased educational spending, will not be able in the near term to sufficiently expand the number of public schools to meet the existing demand. Near-term plans should, therefore, include diversifying the sponsorship of schools. One strategy could involve working with NGOs to establish community schools that receive some startup funding from the government with the promise of full funding after several years. This proved a successful approach to expanding the supply of schools in Pakistan's Balochistan Province, an effort that began in the late 1980s with USAID funding. In some countries, governments should consider strengthening Islamic schools to meet the educational needs of secondary-level students by working with those schools that incorporate the national curriculum. Distance learning should also be considered for providing secondary education, particularly in isolated, hard-to-reach areas.

- *Increasing educational opportunities for out-of-school youth.* In some of the countries studied, high unemployment among youth is mostly due to limited job opportunities. In other countries, youth are unemployed because they lack the necessary skills to land a job. Vocational training, however, is generally provided in secondary-level schools, and is therefore out of reach for youth who have dropped out of primary-level school. Insufficient educational opportunities, combined with a limited labor market, mean many youth have few job prospects, participate only marginally in the modern economy, and are more vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups.

Insufficient educational opportunities, combined with a limited labor market, mean many youth have few job prospects, participate only marginally in the modern economy, and are more vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups.

In those countries that lack educational opportunities for out-of-school youth, consideration should be given to creating educational programs that can provide these adolescents with educational opportunities or some sort of technical or vocational training through alternative forms of distance learning, non-formal education, or specialized training. There also needs to be a stronger link between the private sector and any workforce development program to ensure that people are being trained to meet the needs of the economy. In addition, programs should establish employment linkages with local businesses to provide on-the-job training experiences and apprenticeships. Job counseling and job listings for students should also be made available.

Building Quality through Teacher Training, Curricula Reform, and Better Materials

Addressing the constraints impeding quality education is a necessary dimension of improving public schools. Declining educational quality has resulted in high repetition and dropout rates from schools and a student force that is not academically equipped to contribute to the development of their society in any meaningful way. Educational quality is an outcome of complex system operations. Host governments must be committed to simultaneously supporting multiple interventions to improve the quality of education and instruction. The quality of public education can be improved by the following:

- *Building a cadre of dedicated and qualified teachers.* With few opportunities to upgrade skills through inservice training or supervision, and an absence of meaningful incentives for improving performance, many teachers lack the motivation to overcome their deficiencies and create a quality learning environment for their students. The reasons underlying existing shortages of qualified and dedicated teachers will dictate the kinds of approaches governments and donors need to pursue.

  In some countries, there may be a need to establish appropriate but flexible educational qualifications to guide teacher recruitment. In rural areas, where there is a scarcity of individuals who have completed secondary school or university, tenth grade education should be required for primary school teachers. However, there should be a condition that such teachers upgrade their knowledge and skills by obtaining additional training or education within a reasonable time. In some countries, such as Egypt, where highly educated citizens are unemployed, consideration should be given to hiring unemployed doctors, engineers, and scientists on a contractual basis to teach math and science. This would help address the problem of unemployment while helping improve educational quality in these subject areas.

  Incentives are at the heart of recruiting and retaining good teachers. Teacher salaries should be sufficient to cover basic living expenses, and additional benefits such as free housing and transportation should be offered to encourage teachers to accept appointments in rural areas. Also, efforts need to be made to address the low status of the teaching profession by providing increased recognition for the significant role teachers play in children's lives.

Host governments must be committed to simultaneously supporting multiple interventions to improve the quality of education and instruction.

  Inservice teacher training needs to be strengthened to improve teachers' mastery of the content of the subjects taught. Also, teachers need training in modern pedagogical methods that encourage student participation and active learning. Participatory methods that emphasize inquiry, questioning, and group discussion are effective in helping children develop critical thinking, analytical, and problem-solving skills. To create a conducive teaching and learning environment, teachers need education in childhood development and in how to create an appropriate learning environment for young children. Teachers need to learn how to prepare lesson plans based on the learning capacity of their students. Refresher courses and regular supervision are also critical to ensure that teachers employ and properly apply what they learn during their training.

- *Improving the relevance and appropriateness of curricula.* Outdated and inappropriate curricula have contributed to the political problem caused by high unemployment in many of the countries studied, because a growing proportion of the young and unemployed are graduates with inappropriate skills but high expectations. Curricular reform is needed so

that students can obtain jobs and be better citizens. Curricular reform needs to adjust the pace and sequence of teaching to what children learn at different ages. Increasingly, many educational systems are recognizing the importance of incorporating civic education into their curricula to help students develop participatory skills that enhance their ability to work cooperatively. The curricula should promote activity-based learning, including apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities that could be arranged through partnerships established with local businesses.

- *Increasing the supply of quality textbooks and instructional materials.* International and comparative research has consistently shown that the availability of textbooks is one of the strongest predictors of educational attainment. Many USAID-funded education programs have focused on the design and production of textbooks and supplementary learning materials. In many cases, these efforts have contributed to improved learning outcomes. In Egypt and Pakistan, perhaps the most enduring USAID contribution was reforming the process for developing instructional materials. In both countries, academic specialists designed textbooks for many years with little or no pilot testing of the materials. The Primary Education Development (PED) Program in Pakistan and the Basic Education Project in Egypt supported teaching-materials design teams that involved teachers in designing and field-testing new materials prior to their production and distribution. In Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province, student achievement improved among children using the materials produced through this process.

- *Increasing school readiness of academically unprepared students.* As a result of efforts to provide education for all, children from the least advantaged groups in society have increasingly enrolled in public schools. These children come from poor, illiterate households, and have greater learning-support needs than do more privileged students who previously constituted the majority of school populations. Schools are not designed for—and few teachers are trained to respond to—the learning needs posed by these children. Preschools with developmentally appropriate curricula should be established to help such students begin to acquire educational habits that can boost their readiness to learn. International studies have shown that preschool programs that promote school readiness among poor and rural children are likely to reduce repetition and dropout.

- *Promoting greater community participation in schools.* The literature on community schools indicates that parents and communities can play an important management role in schools. There is growing evidence showing that when parents play an active role in monitoring teacher and student performance, teacher and student absenteeism decreases and the quality of education and learning improves. Public school systems in many of the countries studied, however, have not accepted the idea of community participation in educational management, and therefore, do little to promote it. Policy reforms and civic education are needed in many countries to encourage community participation.

  Promoting community participation includes efforts to enhance the strength and effectiveness of community members to help manage schools and monitor student and teacher performance. For example, in Pakistan's Balochistan province, efforts were made to help communities establish parent-teacher associations. For the first time, parents and communities began participating in their children's education.

- *Strengthening institutional capacity to effectively manage and deliver education programs.* To achieve the greatest educational impact, central and local institutions must have the capacity to effectively plan and manage the limited human and financial resources devoted to education. While there is considerable variation in the

strength of these institutions among the countries studied, all have problems that undermine their effectiveness. Efforts to strengthen educational planning and management in most of the countries studied are sporadic and tend to accelerate only when donor resources, both financial and technical, become available. Unless host governments are seriously committed to strengthening educational institutions at all levels, other efforts to improve educational outcomes will not be successful or sustainable.

Decentralization of educational authority for planning, resource allocation, and management of education is needed to ensure that educational programs respond to regional needs and realities. In many countries, strengthening the capacity of local education offices will be necessary to ensure that staff can effectively plan and carry out these increased responsibilities.

Clear, open, and transparent procedures need to be established and enforced to curb the rampant corruption that characterizes the education sector in many countries, particularly in the areas of teacher recruitment, selection, and promotion; and in the construction and maintenance of schools and office buildings. To ensure that new schools are constructed on the basis of need rather than their potential to yield financial or political payoff, education management information systems linked to geographic databases showing concentrations of populations and locations of existing schools should be established to identify where to concentrate teacher recruitment and construction efforts. Implicit in better data management is improved transparency, which can spotlight and inhibit the misuse or leakage of resources from the system due to corruption.

Requiring that education budgets at every level of the system be publicly displayed is an additional measure that has been successfully used to reduce corruption. In Uganda, all fund transfers at district education offices were published in the newspapers and broadcast on the radio. Each primary school was required to post a public notice of all inflows of funds to the schools. Within three years, 90 percent of non-salary funds provided by the central government were reaching the schools.

Strengthening the Islamic Education System

Many Islamic schools have taken on the additional role of providing children with a secular as well as a religious education. In order for Islamic schools to serve as an "effective" alternative to the public school system, they must provide a quality education with a content similar to what is provided in public schools. Of all the countries included in this study, Malaysia is one of the best models for establishing a quality Islamic education system. All Islamic schools, both public and private, are registered, regulated, and inspected by government ministries. In order to be registered, Islamic schools must meet standards set by the government regarding their finances, location, and teacher qualifications. Malaysia's Department of Islamic and Moral Education oversees the curriculum and teachings in primary and secondary Islamic schools to ensure that they are organized, taught, and assessed according to national standards. The president of Malaysia has established a zero-tolerance policy regarding any extremist element in Islamic schools, and government action has been swift in closing down schools where extremist elements have been reported. Not only have these efforts limited the extremist threat among Islamic schools, but they have also resulted in high quality schools, many of which have a prestigious reputation for serving the religious and secular educational needs of children.

No doubt, the clear vision of Malaysia's prime minister regarding education has played an important role in the emergence of Malaysia's successful Islamic school system. During an interview with Singapore's Madrasa Quandry, the prime minister said, "There is a great need for Muslims to debunk

some of the current beliefs which have contributed to their decline. Principal among these is [that] teaching [in] this world is not meant for believers. Instead, it is meant for the nonbelievers to enjoy. Unless and until we stop dividing knowledge into religious and the secular, unless we regard all knowledge as faith enhancing, and therefore not only permissible but vital to Muslims and their faith, we are never going to build Islamic civilization. Worse still, we are going to remain in the modern equivalent of the dark ages."[11]

There should be regulations that require all secular and Islamic schools, both public and private, to be registered and supervised by the government and function under educational policies and laws.

The experiences of Malaysia can serve as a useful guide to other governments, recognizing that Malaysia's circumstances are unique. Malaysia is by far the richest country included in the sample, has a government quite committed to good policies overall, and has a successful and growing economy.

Designing a Strategy for Improving Islamic Schools while Guarding against Extremism

The following provides guidance for designing strategies for strengthening Islamic schools and guarding against extremist threats:

- *Engaging Islamic school leaders to participate in providing education to all learners.* Host country governments should be encouraged to more proactively engage Islamic school leaders in their countries to discuss how the public and Islamic school systems can work together to reach all learners.

- *Establishing government oversight for all Islamic schools.* Islamic school operations are under some government supervision in about half of the countries included in this study. What "supervision" actually means, however, varies tremendously from one country to another, ranging from tight control to "supervision" in name only. Islamic schools that function outside of government oversight are more likely to provide an inadequate education, and, in a few cases, promote extremist views. The strings attached to sectarian foreign funding may also promote radicalism.

In order to ensure the quality and integrity of educational programs offered to the public, there should be regulations that require all secular and Islamic schools, both public and private, to be registered and supervised by the government and function under educational policies and laws. For regulations to be meaningful, regulations should include mechanisms for enforcing regulations and punishing violators. To ensure that Islamic schools retain their identify as religious schools, governments should establish a separate but parallel accreditation system that accredits Islamic schools according to specific standards.

In countries such as Malaysia, Morocco, Egypt, and Uzbekistan, extremist elements in Islamic schools have been minimized to a large extent through the establishment and enforcement of such regulations. While the experiences in these countries can serve as a useful guide to other governments as they attempt to combat the growing threat of Islamic extremism, efforts to establish government oversight must be based on the particular circumstances that exist in the country for them to be effective. It is vital that any such influence be curtailed and monitored by host governments and that donor funds are not inadvertently used to further antipluralistic agendas. Donor funds can provide an incentive for the host countries to implement a national registration and certification process. However, donors should pay careful attention to the design and implementation of such registration systems because some antidemocratic countries have used registration systems to suppress free speech and progressive teaching.

[11] Fernandez, José. "Singapore's 'Madrasah' Quandry." March 6, 2001.

- *Increasing the number of Islamic schools that offer the nationally-approved curriculum.* Graduates of Islamic schools that don't include secular subjects in their curriculum face significant challenges in joining the secular workforce or proceeding to universities. Thus, Islamic schools, especially in rural areas where no public schools exist, should be encouraged to broaden their curriculum to incorporate more secular subjects. Despite the many Islamic schools that have already taken on the additional role of teaching secular subjects, many Islamic school principals are likely to be highly resistant to incorporating secular teachings in their schools.

  Efforts to mainstream more Islamic schools into the national education system should begin with schools that show a willingness to implement certain reforms. Working with these "seeds of change" and showcasing their results could set the stage for wider reforms in Islamic school systems in many countries and may encourage other Islamic schools to improve the learning skills of their students. Mainstreaming Islamic schools into the national education system will help Islamic schools participate more authentically and effectively in providing an alternative educational choice for families.

- *Strengthening the quality of secular education provided in Islamic schools.* Given the poor academic qualifications of many Islamic schoolteachers, most teachers of secular subjects will need to upgrade their content knowledge of the secular subjects in the curriculum. To help create a more favorable learning environment in classrooms, teachers should be introduced to modern, participatory, and student-centered pedagogical methods. While participatory learning approaches are characterized as "modern pedagogical methods," group work, peer teaching, self-pacing, and one-on-one coaching—all components of interactive and participatory learning—were the approaches used in traditional Islamic pedagogy.[14] To encourage receptivity to such teaching methods, participatory learning should be introduced as an approach that builds on the strengths of traditional Islamic pedagogy.

  As suggested for public schools, the curricula should promote activity-based learning, including apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities to facilitate the absorption of Islamic school students into the job market once they complete school. Vocational training programs, such as those offered in pesantrens in Indonesia, should also be considered as a way for Islamic schools to diversify student preparation for employment.

Mainstreaming Islamic schools into the national education system will help Islamic schools participate more authentically and effectively in providing an alternative educational choice for families.

- *Encouraging moderate religious teachings in Islamic schools.* Many Islamic schools provide religious education based on moderate interpretations of Islamic precepts. Such schools effectively serve two groups—parents and governments. Parents want their children to learn the spiritual and moral values of Islam so that they become good Muslims. Governments want their citizens to be law abiding and peaceful.

  To encourage moderate religious teachings in more Islamic schools, governments could utilize their ministries of religious affairs and/or education to create advisory councils that approve the national curricula, material, and textbooks used throughout the Islamic schooling system. Most Muslim countries have their own cadre of moderate Muslim scholars who could inspect the material taught in such institutions to ensure that the religious lessons are theological rather than political. Islamic scholars and institutions

[14] Boyle, Helen N. "Nigeria Trip Report: Qur'anic School Strategy and Mini Needs Assessment." Draft of 2/25/02. 12.

from around the world can offer training to interested Islamic teachers and principals. This advisory council can determine whether the country should 1) create its own material that replaces what it discovers to be "inappropriate" foreign material, 2) find other foreign sources of material that teach traditional interpretations of Islam, or 3) approve the curricula as it currently exists but ensure that it remains part of a national agenda.

Such efforts could also be reinforced by inviting renowned moderate Islamic scholars to deliver public lectures that share the original message of Islam, which emphasizes tolerance and compassion for others (including non-Muslims) and promotes independent reasoning (ijtihad). By offering such lectures to the public, more parents may be in a better position to make an informed choice regarding the Islamic schools their children attend.

These recommendations are made with the knowledge that there are major disagreements within the Muslim world about how Islam should be practiced. There is a danger that the United States might be accused of siding with one religious perspective over others, and that the goal of U.S. policy is to counteract the militant aspects of Islam that have been imported from some Middle Eastern countries. To counteract this, the United States must emphasize universal values (e.g., the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights) that both Muslims and non-Muslims alike can embrace.

Conclusions

For the citizens of a country to participate in economic progress at home and in the global marketplace, they must have an opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills demanded by the job market. Yet, for many of the children living in most of the countries studied, this is a distant goal. With the exception of Malaysia, none of the countries studied have established an effective education system capable of providing universal access to quality education. Without education, children miss the opportunity to become productive members of their society and fail to reap the promised benefits of financial security and enhanced social status.

USAID's goal is to support education in the Muslim world by building on the strengths and ideals of the indigenous culture. This is best achieved by supporting improvements in both secular and religious educational institutions, as both reach different segments of the population. To ensure that USAID assists only institutions that foster a respect for universal human values of dignity, compassion, and tolerance, host countries should develop standards for both the secular and religious curricula of recipient institutions. A registration and certification system would help a host country to provide checks and balances in the education sector. Such a system could help weed out the promotion of violence and intolerance.

Obviously, access to education is not going to dissuade all "vulnerable" youth from joining terrorist groups. Joining a terrorist group provides immediate gratification on many levels, whereas education is a long-term endeavor and will not serve as a competitive choice for some youth. Other, more complex, multifaceted approaches will be needed for such youth. Changing the teaching-learning environment in schools should be one part of the approach.

For most, achieving the goal of long-term education depends on experiencing periodic moments of gratification throughout the pursuit. What constitutes "gratification" varies from person to person, but many derive a sense of gratification from a sense of belonging, stemming from being able to contribute to something meaningful and being acknowledged for having contributed something of value. Unfortunately, the poor teaching-learning environment in most developing country classrooms does not provide this sense of meaning.

Dynamic child-centered interactive classrooms that are focused on subjects that are practical and relevant to students' lives usually result in capturing the imagination and minds of young people. Education during the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammed was both practical and relevant, drawing its substance from the everyday experiences and day-to-day problems of the early Muslim community. Then as now, content taught in both secular and Islamic schools should be linked to the natural concerns of students and the larger issues facing the world in which they live.

An effective education system provides all children with access to quality education. A quality educations helps citizens not only get a good job, but also to become better citizens. A strong and viable education system should be able to produce children who are able to identify, understand, and work cooperatively to solve problems that face their community and the world. However, simply

acquiring capabilities will not lead to children becoming productive members of society in the absence of economic, political, and social opportunities. Both sides of the equation—increasing capabilities on the one hand and increasing opportunities to use them on the other—are critical for responding to aspirations for a better life and to meaningfully contribute to their country in building a prosperous future for all citizens.

Annex 1. Summary of Country Education Profiles

Country profiles are arranged by region: Middle East and North Africa (Egypt, Morocco, Yemen), South Asia (Bangladesh, Pakistan), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia), West Africa (Nigeria, Guinea, Mali, Senegal), and Central Asia (Uzbekistan).

Country (Percent Muslim)	Government Expenditure on Education (Percent)	Public School Access	Public School Quality	Students in Public Schools (Percent)	Students in Islamic Schools (Percent)
Middle East and North Africa					
Egypt (94)	15	*Primary:* High enrollments but regional disparities *Secondary:* High enrollments but regional disparities *Gender:* Gender disparities greatest at secondary level	Declining	69	31
Morocco (99)	25	*Primary:* High enrollments but regional disparities *Secondary:* Low enrollments *Gender:* Gender disparities persist	Declining	No info	No info
Yemen (100)	n.a.	*Primary:* Moderate enrollments but regional disparities *Secondary:* Low enrollments *Gender:* Gender disparities exist	Low	No info	No info
South Asia					
Bangladesh (83)	16	*Primary:* High enrollments but regional disparities *Secondary:* Moderate enrollments but regional disparities *Gender:* Gender disparities persist	Low	92	8
Pakistan (97)	7	*Primary:* Relatively high enrollments but regional disparities *Secondary:* Low enrollments *Gender:* Significant gender disparities	Deteriorating	No info	No info

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Country (Percent Muslim)	Government Expenditure on Education (Percent)	Public School Access	Public School Quality	Students in Public Schools (Percent)	Students in Islamic Schools (Percent)
Southeast Asia					
Indonesia (88)	8	*Primary*: High enrollments but regional disparities *Secondary*: Moderate enrollments but regional disparities *Gender*: Relative gender equity	Deteriorating	85–90	10–15
Malaysia (53)	15	*Primary*: High enrollments but regional disparities *Secondary*: High enrollments but regional disparities *Gender*: Relative gender equity	Relatively good but needs some improvement	Primary: 78 Secondary: 89	Primary: 22 Secondary: 11
West Africa					
Nigeria (50)	7	*Primary*: Relatively high enrollments but regional disparities *Secondary*: Low enrollments *Gender*: Relative gender equity	Low	No info	No info
Guinea (85)	27	*Primary*: Low enrollments *Secondary*: Extremely low enrollments *Gender*: Significant gender disparities	Declining	No info	No info
Mali (90)	n.a.	*Primary*: Low enrollments *Secondary*: Extremely low enrollments *Gender*: Gender disparities persist	Declining	No info	No info
Senegal (92)	33	*Primary*: Moderate enrollments but regional disparities *Secondary*: Extremely low enrollments *Gender*: Gender disparities persist	Declining	No info	No info
Central Asia					
Uzbekistan (88)	21	*Primary*: High enrollments but increasing dropouts *Secondary*: High enrollments but increasing dropouts *Gender*: Relative gender equity	Declining	No info	No info

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Annex 2. Summary of Country Profiles of Islamic Schools

Country profiles are arranged by region: Middle East and North Africa (Egypt, Morocco, Yemen), South Asia (Bangladesh, Pakistan), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia), West Africa (Nigeria, Guinea, Mali, Senegal), and Central Asia (Uzbekistan).

Types of Schools	Public or Private	Number	Teaches Religious Subjects Only?	Teaches Secular Subjects?	Extremist Threat	Governance
Middle East and North Africa						
Egypt						
Al-Azhar	Public	—	No	Yes: public school curricula	Potential Threat: No evidence of existing threat. However, both have received funding from Saudis for over 20 years.	Financed and governed by Egyptian Government
Private Religious Schools	Private	206 (1998)	No	Yes: public school curricula		Function under auspices of Ministry of Education
Morocco						
Koranic Pre-Schools	Public	—	Yes	No	None. for young children only	Urban: controlled by Moroccan government ministries; Rural: loose oversight
Original Education	Public	45	No	Yes: public school curricula	No information	Managed by Moroccan government ministry
Yemen						
Madrasas	Both	—	Yes	No	High but Controlled. Government of Yemen has closed 1,300 madrasas because of alleged extremist threat.	Government controls public madrasas—not private ones
South Asia						
Bangladesh						
Aliya Madrasas	Public	Total : 6,789	No	Yes: public school curricula	Low: No evidence of existing threat.	Functions under government ministry and financially supported mostly by government
Quomi Madrasas	Private		Yes	No	Potential Threat: Limited reports of existing threat. However, closely linked with Wahhabi teachings and receives funding from Gulf States.	Not under Bangladeshi Government control

Types of Schools	Public or Private	Number	Teaches Religious Subjects Only?	Teaches Secular Subjects?	Extremist Threat	Governance
Pakistan						
Mosque Primary Schools	Public	25,229	No	Some	High: particularly in Madrasas—history of affiliation with radicals—10–15 percent affiliated with extremist religious/political groups	Ministry of Education finances and manages schools.
Koranic Schools	Private	—	Yes	No		
Madrasas	Private	10,000–30,000	Yes	No		Most not under Pakistan Government control. Funds from Gulf states. 6,528 registered with government and operate under Ministry.
Southeast Asia						
Indonesia						
Madrasas	Public	3,224 (9%)	No	Yes	No evidence	Public madrasas operate under Ministry of Religion
Madrasas	Private	33,308 (91%)	No	Yes	High in a minority of madrasas	
Pesantrens (Boarding Schools)	Private	11,312	Most	Some follow public school curricula	High in a minority of pesantrens	Not under Indonesian Government control
Malaysia						
National Religious Schools	Public	Total: 2,591	No	All follow public school curricula	High in private schools but controlled: several schools have been closed because of alleged extremist elements within the schools.	All subject to Ministry of Education regulation. National religious schools are fully funded by federal government.
State Religious Schools	Public		No			Fully funded by state government with supplementary funds from federal government
Islamic Private Schools	Private		No			Private Islamic Schools are loosely regulated and funded by federal and state government grants, Islamic councils, and parental school fees.
West Africa						
Nigeria						
Koranic Schools	Private	—	Most	Some	Low: No evidence of any current threat.	No formal or explicit control by government for either.
Islamiya Schools	Private	—	No	Yes		
Guinea, Mali, Senegal						
Koranic Schools (Primary)	Private	—	No	Some	Potential Threat: no evidence of any existing threat. However, some are influenced by Wahhabi teachings.	No info
Madrasas (Secondary)	Private	—	Yes	No		
Central Asia						
Uzbekistan						
Formal Madrasas	Private	—	Yes	No	Potential Threat: Gulf states fund some religious schools but government is monitoring closely	All are subject to strict government regulation.
Informal Religious Study Groups	Private	—	Yes	No		

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